THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 1991

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

No earthly tongue can voice the gratitude we feel for the extraordinary bestowals vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty to His worldwide community and to the World Center of His Faith during the year just ended. We bow our heads in humility before the striking evidences of His sustaining grace and all-compelling might.

The overwhelming danger which, as a result of the turmoil in the Middle East, enveloped the Holy Land during the latter part of the year receded without halting or even seriously hampering the operation of the Bahá'í administration. The situation was a poignant reminder of the contrast between the unobtrusive, steadily developing, distinctly integrative System of Bahá'u'lláh and the turbulent character of the Age of Transition, "whose tribulations," Shoghi Effendi avers, "are the precursors of that Era of blissful felicity which is to incarnate God's ultimate purpose for all mankind." It was another of the "ominous signs simultaneously proclaiming the agonies of a disintegrating civilization and the birth pangs of that World Order—that Ark of human salvation—that must needs arise upon its ruins."

The forces which united the remedial reactions of so many nations to the sudden crisis in this region demonstrated beyond any doubt the necessity of the principle of collective security prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh more than a century ago as a means of resolving conflict. While the international arrangement envisioned by Him for the full application of this principle is far from having been adopted by the rulers of mankind, a long step towards the behavior outlined for the nations by the Lord of the Age has thus been taken. How illuminating are Bahá'u'lláh's words foreshadowing the future reorientation of the nations: "Be united, O concourse of the sovereigns of the world," He wrote, "for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice."

Indeed, from whatever direction we gaze, the power of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is visibly at work in the world. In the call for a new world order, which has issued like a refrain from the statements of political leaders and influential thinkers, even when they themselves were incapable of defining their own meaning, can be discerned the slow awakening of humanity to the principal purpose of His Revelation. That such a call should have come so insistently from the head of that republic which is destined, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, to be "the first nation to establish the foundation of international agreement" and to "lead all nations spiritually," is an indication of the efficacy and the acceleration of two simultaneous processes, one operating outside and one inside the Cause, which Shoghi Effendi tells us are destined to culminate "in a single glorious consummation."

Within the Cause, the signs of overwhelming achievements for the Six Year Plan, though not necessarily as projected at the outset, are abundant. Arresting examples are evident in the wake of the phenomenal changes occurring in the Soviet Union and its former satellite countries. Just one year since the reestablishment of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Moscow, a National Spiritual Assembly of the Soviet Union is to be formed. Similarly, little more than a year since the revolutionary political changes in Romania, the Government has recognized the Bahá'í community as a religious association with the right to spread the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh; here, too, a National Spiritual Assembly is to be formed this Riḍván. Rapid expansion of the Faith in Czechoslovakia compelled the decision taken only in recent weeks also to establish a National Spiritual Assembly there. At the same time, in the Caribbean area, the National Spiritual

Assembly of the West Leeward Islands will be formed as a result of the division of the Leeward Islands group into two regional administrative units. With these four very welcome formations, the number of National Spiritual Assemblies reaches 155.

We are happy to say that three Hands of the Cause of God will represent the Universal House of Justice at these historic events: Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum in Romania, Mr. ʻAlí Akbar Furútan in the Soviet Union, and Dr. ʻAlí-Muḥammad Varqá in Czechoslovakia. Counselor Ruth Pringle will be the representative in the West Leeward Islands.

Another illustration of the rising authority of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in the public mind emerges from Germany, where the Federal Constitutional Court, the highest legal authority in the land, rendered a decision of capital importance to the recognition of the Faith. A series of lower courts had refused to register the by-laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly on the grounds that the authority granted to the National Spiritual Assembly in that document violated the legal principle requiring the autonomy of all legally incorporated associations. The issues involved are indeed complex and cannot be elaborated here. Suffice it to say that the Federal Constitutional Court upheld the appeal of the Local Spiritual Assembly in a long, closely reasoned decision in which, among other things, it affirmed the right of the Bahá'í community to gain legal capacity in the very shape ordained in the scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith and stated that its nature as a recognized religion was unquestionably confirmed by its inherent character, by public knowledge, and by the testimony of scholars of comparative religion. So significant was the verdict in the Court's own estimation that it took the rare step of issuing a statement to the press explaining its decision. This outstanding act will have implications for the Bahá'í community far beyond the borders of a united Germany.

Yet another instance of the growing public appreciation for the penetrating perspectives of the Cause involves the Republic of South Africa, where the National Spiritual Assembly, taking advantage of the initiatives of the Government towards resolving the decades-long problem of apartheid, decided to submit its views for the drafting of a new constitution for the country. The President of the South African Law Commission, the judge acting on behalf of the Government, who received the National Spiritual Assembly's submission from a delegation appointed by it, commented that the Bahá'ís were the only group thus far whose ideas had provided a spiritual and moral foundation for a constitution.

Whatever may be the individual effects of any one of these aforementioned developments—and of such others as the appearance of a representative of the Bahá'í International Community as the only non-Buddhist speaker invited to address a public meeting held in conjunction with the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace in Mongolia; the specific mention of the Bahá'ís by Pope John Paul II at a reception during his recent visit to Burundi; the official listing of the Bahá'í Faith as one of the common religions in Tuvalu; the International Exposition on Education for Peace sponsored by the Brazilian National Spiritual Assembly with the participation of 23 embassies and educational institutions—one thing is abundantly clear: the cumulative impact across the globe affirms the emergence of the Faith from obscurity. Such marks of increasing public recognition of the true character and rich potentialities of the Bahá'í community are a distinctive feature of the advancement of the Faith in the fourth epoch of the Formative Age.

In contemplating these marvelous signs and portents, we cannot resist the impulse to express our profound love and appreciation to the Continental Counselors, and to their Auxiliary Boards, who stimulate and buttress efforts which make possible the accomplishment of such stupendous developments as have already been cited and whose ministrations, more especially, spur the dynamic thrust of the teaching work, which is fundamental to all of the community's successes. We are delighted and encouraged beyond measure by the vigorous beginning which the Boards of Counselors have made as they entered the new term of their indispensable and highly appreciated services to the Bahá'í world. The fresh initiatives to which, with the wholehearted encouragement and splendid support of the International Teaching Centre, they now bend their energies augur

well for a gratifying completion of the Six Year Plan. May their exertions be greatly bolstered by the increase, as of the Day of the Covenant this year, in the number of Auxiliary Board members to 846—90 more than exist at present. The worldwide community will certainly welcome the strength which this action will bring to the scope and quality of the spiritual duties assigned to the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, whose operation at the grass roots is a guarantee of the continued expansion and consolidation of our glorious Faith.

The magnificent progress of the Six Year Plan brightens our spirits and exalts our hopes. All but one of the years of that Plan have passed and a mighty advance toward achieving its seven major objectives has been made. Our community has changed dramatically from what it was at the Plan's beginning in 1986. It has greatly expanded and developed. It is more diverse, more dynamic, more distinctive. As we enter the closing year of the Six Year Plan, a horizon of thrilling prospects stands before us all:

> The preparation of the long-expected, annotated English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Book of Laws, the Most Holy Book, the Mother Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, will be completed—a monumental achievement which alone and of itself will usher in a new stage in the evolution of the Bahá'í world and thus crown the accomplishments of the Six Year Plan.
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> Earthwork on the lower Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb and excavation for the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Annex to the International Archives Building will commence, initiating a new phase of these mighty and incalculably significant enterprises on God's Holy Mountain.
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> The Plan's end will mark the beginning of the Holy Year, 1992–1993, a conscious year-long pause to allow His followers to pay befitting regard to the Centenary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and of the inauguration of His world-unifying Covenant. As has already been announced, major observances are being planned to reflect the distinctive character and world-shaking importance of the two occasions.
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> The one: the gathering of representatives of the Bahá'í world, along with Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, at Bahjí in the precincts of the Mansion, from whence Bahá'u'lláh's liberated Spirit repaired to the throne of His heavenly sovereignty, and in the vicinity of the Most Holy Shrine, wherein the Roll of Honor of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh will be deposited as a gesture indicative of the response of His lovers to His call to spread His teachings throughout the earth. There at Bahjí this gathering will engage in a solemn act of worship, the sacred readings for which will soon be shared with Bahá'í communities everywhere for use in their own commemorations, so as to unify the devotional experience of the entire Bahá'í world during this centennial observance.
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> The other: the World Congress scheduled to be held on 23–26 November 1992 in New York City, where the beloved Master revealed the implications of His station as the appointed Center of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and which He designated as the City of the Covenant. Throughout the world, Bahá'í communities will hold appropriate auxiliary events to magnify the Congress's purpose, which is to celebrate the centenary of the inauguration of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and to proclaim its aims and unifying power. A corollary to these activities will be the wide distribution of a statement on Bahá'u'lláh, prepared at our request by the Office of Public Information, which will serve both as a source of study and inspiration for the Bahá'ís themselves and as an informative publication for presentation to the public. In these and other ways the community of the Greatest Name will endeavor to blazon the Name of Bahá'u'lláh across the globe, to make it a known eminence in the consciousness of peoples everywhere.

Such an exceptional confluence of imminent achievements—the publication of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the progress of the building projects on Mount Carmel, the conclusion of the Six Year Plan,

the inception of the Holy Year—animates the expectations of the Bahá'í world, sets the stage for mightier endeavors than have already been attempted, and points us all to the opening of a new phase of history. It seems fitting, then, that the sacred law which enables each one to express his or her personal sense of devotion to God in a profoundly private act of conscience that promotes the common good, which directly connects the individual believer with the Central Institution of the Faith, and which, above all, ensures to the obedient and the sincere the ineffable grace and abundant blessings of Providence, should, at this favorable juncture, be embraced by all who profess their belief in the Supreme Manifestation of God. With humility before our sovereign Lord, we now announce that as of Riḍván 1992, the beginning of the Holy Year, the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Right of God, will become universally applicable. All are lovingly called to observe it.

Our very dear brothers and sisters: Witness how the Beloved One has answered our entreaties. See how He has enriched our lives with new brethren and new institutions in lands hitherto closed to His healing Word. Consider with what potency His divine prescriptions are being affirmed as guidelines for the behavior of nations large and small. Surely such abounding benedictions have imbued you with indomitable courage and with confidence to face a challenging but brilliant future. Indeed, you have embarked on this auspicious year poised for the ultimate triumph of the Six Year Plan.

May you continue, through your selfless deeds in His service, to be blessed from the inexhaustible treasury of His love and tender care.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]

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